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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA-ECUADOR RELATIONS: ONE STEP BACK

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) President Alvaro Uribe, angry over critical statements from Presidents Rafael Correa and Daniel Ortega, announced on June 23 that the GOC would delay the previously agreed-on resumption of diplomatic relations with Ecuador. The GOE responded by suspending indefinitely the renewal of bilateral relations and hinting at escalating the conflict through trade sanctions. Vice Foreign Minister Camilo Reyes told us there are two levels of GOC-GOE relations: bad at the presidential level, and constructive at the working-level. The Dialogue Group, organized by the Carter Center, met with Uribe on June 25, and is set to meet with Correa on June 26. Group members told us the battle of negative communiques and statements by Uribe and Correa represented a step back after weeks of progress. End summary.

URIBE UPSET BY CORREA AND ORTEGA COMMENTS

2. (U) President Alvaro Uribe responded to a series of negative comments by Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa by announcing on June 23 a delay in the normalization of relations with Ecuador. Uribe was reportedly upset by a series of Correa comments, culminating in Correa's claim in a June 22 interview in Argentine daily "Pagina/12" that Colombian security services executed an Ecuadorian citizen after the March 1 attack against Raul Reyes' FARC camp in Ecuador. Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Maria Isabel Salvador said on June 24 that the GOE would suspend resumption of relations with Colombia for an unknown period, and hinted that the GOE might escalate with trade sanctions. Ecuador broke diplomatic ties after the attack on the Reyes camp.

3. (U) Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's praise for deceased FARC leader Manuel Marulanda, the GON's decision to grant asylum to two Colombian citizens/FARC members and one Mexican who survived the Reyes attack, and Ortega's statements calling Uribe a state sponsor of terror prompted the GOC's decision to denounce Ortega in the OAS. Colombian Permanent Representative to the OAS Camilo Ospina said in a June 24 OAS Permanent Council meeting that Ortega offered "protection, promotion, and open support for terrorists."

TWO LEVELS OF COLOMBIA-ECUADOR RELATIONSHIP

4. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Camilo Reyes told us there are two levels to the Colombian-Ecuadorian relationship: A) the presidential level, which is very bad due to constant verbal attacks on Uribe and the Colombian people by Correa and to a lesser extent Salvador, and B) the career bureaucratic level where the Ecuadorians want to improve relations and

de-escalate the conflict, but are limited by their president's views. He attributed Correa's negative comments to Ecuador's internal political dynamics, noting his need for a successful constituent assembly.

THREE MECHANISMS TO RESUME RELATIONS

15. (C) Reyes told us that in meetings over the last six weeks with his Ecuadorian counterpart Jose Valencia, they have developed three mechanisms to improve bilateral communications. The first focuses on improving security cooperation along the border by reinstating previous communication channels. This could also involve the creation of a technical commission to deal with concrete cases and serve as an early-warning system. Reyes said a late-May meeting of the two militaries was a positive step in this process. The second mechanism focuses on judicial cooperation and would regulate exchanges of information through letters rogatory and other judicial channels. The third deals with the development of more agile instruments to adjudicate and pay compensation to citizens of one country who are damaged by the actions of the other. Reyes said they made some progress on the first two issues, but that discussions on compensation are hampered by the GOE insistence on compensation for the Reyes camp attack--something the GOC will never accept.

OTHER EFFORTS TOWARDS RAPPROCHEMENT

16. (C) On June 25, the Dialogue Group, a groups of prominent Ecuadorians and Colombians set up by the Carter Center to discuss Colombia-Ecuador relations, met with President Uribe

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who urged it to continue its efforts. Group member Angelino Garzon told us they were scheduled to fly to Quito to meet with President Correa on June 26. Garzon, the former, left-leaning Governor of Valle de Cauca, said OAS SYG Jose Miguel Insulza and former President Jimmy Carter coordinated the Group's work, and added that Uribe and Correa seemed to support its initiatives. Still, he said both Uribe and Correa have personalized the dispute--complicating lower-level efforts to improve ties. He said Correa sometimes reacted emotionally and on the spur of the moment. Uribe also appeared to be increasingly playing to his domestic audience. The key to moving ahead with pre-existing plans to renew relations was breaking the cycle of negative statements from both presidents.

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